

**Published: Sept. 8, 2015, *Kokomo Tribune* [Page: A4]**

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## **Editorial: Indiana needs new drug plan**

In 1971, President Richard Nixon officially declared a “war on drugs,” saying drug abuse was “public enemy number one.” In the nearly 45 years since then, this effort has proven to be an utter failure on every level. More than \$1 trillion has been spent. During that time, the incarceration rate per 100,000 has skyrocketed from fewer than 200 in 1970, to around 900 today.

We now have the largest prison population in the world. And what has the never-ending gush of blood and treasure wrought? (After all, this might be defensible if any of it was actually working.) Alas, our state, like the rest of the country, is awash in cheap, hard drugs as our overdose rates reach new heights.

Obviously, a new approach is needed.

With that in mind, we watched with great interest Republican Gov. Mike Pence’s announcement last Tuesday of his new drug enforcement task force, set to meet for the first time Sept. 16. This coalition will include physicians, former and current law enforcement members, a representative from the insurance industry, legislators, a pastor, two judges and a prosecutor.

While this renewed effort is laudable, we hesitate to issue a full-throated endorsement. As our state reporter, Maureen Hayden, reported last week, the new task force will not include anyone from the Indiana Public Defender Council. This contingent has been among the most vocal against the current system of harsh punishment and limited treatment and has every right to a seat at this table. It is a viewpoint that must be represented if we want any meaningful change.

We commend Pence for realizing the seriousness of this issue. However, we hold our applause until we find out what answers this commission comes back with. If it's nothing more than the same punitive, get-tough nonsense we've been seeing for the last half a century, then it should be back to the drawing board. We will expect nothing less than a radical course change. Otherwise, 45 years from now we'll be right back in the same position — if not worse.